



LAWYERS' COMMITTEE
FOR CIVIL RIGHTS AND
ECONOMIC JUSTICE

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50

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Mother Files Federal Civil Rights Lawsuit for the Fatal Police Shooting of Her Unarmed Son in Boston

Lawsuit Filed on the 50th Anniversary of the Assassination
of Martin Luther King, Jr. Amidst National Protests
Concerning Police Killings of Black Men

Boston, MA (April 4, 2018) – Today, Hope Coleman filed a federal civil rights lawsuit against the City of Boston and other defendants to hold them accountable for the fatal shooting of her only son, Terrence Coleman, a 31-year-old Black man with a mental health disability. On October 30, 2016, Boston police shot and killed Terrence shortly after Ms. Coleman made a 911 call for medical assistance.

The complaint, which has been filed in federal court by the **Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Economic Justice** and the law firm, **Fick & Marx LLP**, sets forth how Boston police officers unnecessarily responded to a 911 call from Ms. Coleman for an ambulance to take Terrence to the hospital for medical attention. Terrence was not violent, and he was known around his South End neighborhood as a quiet, caring person. Although Ms. Coleman told the 911 operator that she did not need or want any police involvement, the Boston Police Department responded and instead of helping Terrence, a Boston police officer shot and killed him.

“There was no reason for the Boston police to kill my son. They should not have even been there in the first place. As a mother, you would never expect that a call for medical help would end up with police shooting and killing your only son,” said Ms. Coleman.

Today marks the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., and protests are raging over the recent death of Stephon Clark, another unarmed Black man who was killed by police in Sacramento, California. Citing Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, Eric Garner in New York City, and numerous other victims of fatal police encounters, Ms. Coleman said: “I want justice for my son, Terrence.” She added, “The national crisis of police killing Black men has to stop.”

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“Just as Dr. King’s assassination in 1968 led to major civil rights reforms, we hope that Terrence’s tragic death in 2016 will cause police departments in Boston and across the country to change how they engage with Black people and those with mental health disabilities,” said Attorney Sophia Hall of the Lawyers’ Committee. “Discriminatory police tactics – from racial profiling to the disproportionate use of force – actively contribute to the growing tension and mistrust between communities of color and law enforcement, so we are going to court to honor both Terrence’s life and MLK’s legacy,” added Attorney Hall.

“In Boston, police officers and emergency medical technicians receive little or no training to properly assist individuals with mental health disabilities, and the inadequate training that they do receive endorses and reinforces baseless, discriminatory stereotypes that persons with mental illness are violent and dangerous,” said Attorney Rebecca Chapman of Fick & Marx LLP. “Today’s lawsuit outlines how the City’s practice of failing to properly train its personnel set in motion a chain of events that ultimately led to Terrence’s tragic and unnecessary death.” Attorney Chapman noted that throughout the fatal encounter, Ms. Coleman was only a few feet away, and she has consistently denied the false claim that Terrence had a knife or posed any danger.

This lawsuit alleges federal civil rights violations including the use of excessive force, unlawful seizure, and the failure to train; discrimination under the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act; and wrongful death and other state law claims. Defendants include the City of Boston, Boston Police Commissioner William Evans, other city officials, and the individual police officers and EMTs involved in the incident – including the officer who fired the fatal shots, Garrett Boyle. The lawsuit seeks compensatory and punitive damages.

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